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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes a two-phase research project on the strategies used by headteachers in small Scottish primary schools to manage mandated educational changes. The research focused on four initiatives of the past decade: 5-14 Curriculum Guidelines, School Development Planning, Staff Development and Appraisal, and Devolved School Management. In the first phase, survey responses were received from 708 of the 863 small primary schools with 120 students or less. The second phase consisted of case studies in 18 schools. Two of the initiatives had been fully or partially implemented in virtually all responding schools. About half of headteachers identified problems with the pace of change and lack of time. The most frequently used management activity in implementation of change was informal discussions with other headteachers. Tables list management activities by frequency of use, overall and for each initiative. Sections on each of the four initiatives discuss management activities supporting implementation and factors inhibiting implementation. The findings suggest a small-school management style involving creation of a collegial team; networking with outside colleagues and resources; and situational management based on realistic assessment of context, tasks, and available resources. Recommendations are offered to headteachers, education authorities, and national organizations to support continuing development of a small-school management style. (SV)

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INTERCHANGE

No 54

Managing Change in Small Primary Schools

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Managing Change in Small Primary Schools

Valerie Wilson and Joanna McPake

SOEID Educational Research Unit and Scottish Council for Research in Education

In January 1996, the Scottish Council for Research in Education began a study of the management of change, including Devolved School Management, in small primary schools throughout Scotland. The study was funded by The Scottish Office Education and Industry Department, Research and Intelligence Unit.

The research was conducted in two phases. The first phase was based upon the results of a postal survey of headteachers in every small primary school in Scotland (863 schools). A total of 708 responded giving a response rate of 82%. A small school was defined as one with a roll of 120 pupils or less, and therefore, the focus of the research was on the teaching headteacher - a role which is found predominantly within small schools.

The second phase, conducted from January to April 1997 consisted of an examination of the effective management of change in 18 case-study small schools. This was designed primarily to illuminate issues emerging from the national survey. The findings from both phases were combined and are reported here. Additionally, a summary of characteristics of respondents is included to provide a national profile of small-school headteachers.

> . . . We have to recognise that if a system isn't changing then there is something wrong with the system, but you also have to recognise that change brings stress . . .
>
> *Assistant Director of Education*

> *Rural people feel that the quality of schooling in their areas is superior to that found in large towns and cities . . .*
>
> *The Scottish Office (1995) Command Paper.3041, p. 14*

Background

This research project has a number of starting points. Firstly, very little previous research has focused specifically on Scottish small schools, despite the significant number of small primary schools within Scotland – approximately 40% of the total number of primary schools in 1996 had rolls of 120 pupils or less. The majority of these schools are sited predominantly, but not exclusively, within rural areas.

Secondly, there has been extensive, multiple educational innovation throughout the past decade which has affected all schools. Four initiatives in particular, 5-14 Curriculum Guidelines, School Development Planning (SDP), Staff Development and Appraisal(SDA) – relaunched as Staff Development and Review in January 1998 – and Devolved School Management(DSM), have significant implications for the headteacher's management role.

Thirdly, the organisation of small schools, which often involves both a duality of role for the teaching headteacher and vertical grouping of pupils, differs from that of large schools. The siting of Gaelic medium units, often as one composite class attached to a small primary school, is an additional factor which some headteachers must manage.

Finally, there is little information about the career patterns and expectations of headteachers in small schools and how these may affect managerial style and continuing development needs. We argue that headship of a small school may be viewed in two distinct but not necessarily compatible

ways: as an 'end of career' job – perhaps associated with a life choice – or a route to 'bigger things'. How the job is perceived, by teachers and education authorities, will crucially affect the management style(s) adopted, and ultimately the curricular outcomes. These are some of the contextual factors within which this research project is located.

The research

Headteachers in all Scottish schools have had to manage educational innovation: our particular concern in this study was to identify the strategies adopted by headteachers in small schools. Specifically the research aimed to:

- identify management strategies and activities adopted by headteachers in small schools to manage change
- assess available support and development opportunities

and also

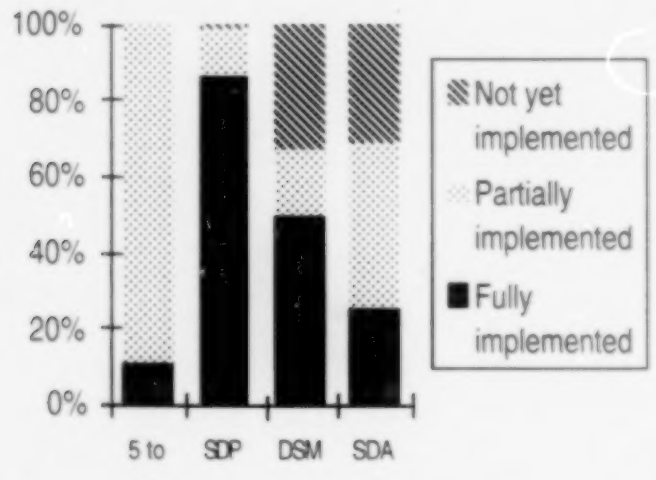
- use the information gathered as a basis for making recommendations for the continuing development of managerial strategies and skills by small-school headteachers.

Findings

Managing change

For all schools, both large and small, the past decade has been a period of rapid change in terms of both the curriculum and school management. At the time of the survey, most headteachers in small schools reported that they had either fully or partially implemented the four major initiatives: 5-14, SDP, DSM and SDA.

Figure a: Extent of implementation of four major initiatives in small schools throughout Scotland in December 1996



There are marked differences across small schools in their pattern of implementation of the four major initiatives.

How does your school/ authority conform to the national pattern?

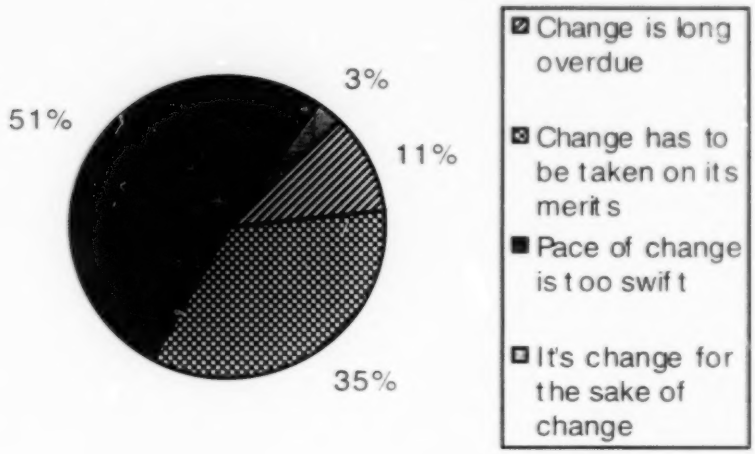
Of the four initiatives, heads reported being furthest ahead with the full implementation of SDP, although a very small proportion (1%) had not implemented this at all. All schools in the sample had at least partially implemented 5-14 Curriculum Guidelines (90%) and a minority of headteachers (10%) claimed to have fully implemented them. These differences may, in part,

result from historical factors. The 5-14 Curriculum Guidelines and SDP were introduced earlier than DSM and SDA, and it is therefore not surprising that schools were further ahead with these two. Almost half (49%) of the headteachers said that they had fully implemented DSM, and 18% had partially implemented it. A quarter of all respondents (25%) reported the full implementation of SDA, and just under half (44%) had partially implemented it. Some regional variations may also reflect differences in the ways in which the implementation of 5-14 was presented to staff and supported in each education authority. However, an important element in any change is the attitudes of those implementing it – in our case headteachers in small schools.

Attitudes towards change

The largest group of respondents (51%) identified change as problematic because of the pace of change and lack of time in which to achieve it. (35% thought that change had to be taken on its merits, 11% thought change was long overdue, and only 3% thought that it was 'change for the sake of change'.

Figure b: Headteachers' perceptions of recent changes



Headteachers reported little resistance to change but to the timescales involved.

Should a different timescale be established for small schools?

This suggests that the development of underlying support for the initiatives may have been impeded by the practicalities of implementation. As one headteacher put it:

> *Although I agree with the philosophy [5-14] . . . there is simply not enough time to cover all the targets. TIME, TIME, TIME – there are not enough hours in the day*
> (Headteacher, 19-pupil school)

Implementing the initiatives

Headteachers reported using a range of management activities to implement each of the four initiatives, drawing on available support and expertise, both internally within their schools and externally from education bodies, professional networks and parents. The full range of activities used is shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Management activities used for the implementation of the major initiatives

n = 704

Management activity	*Used at least once*	
	%	*Overall rank*
Informal discussions with other headteachers	*96*	*1*
Advice from EDS/ EAs	*91*	*2=*
Documentation	*90*	*2=*
Formal consultation with staff	*91*	*4*
Informal discussion with staff	*89*	*5*
Target setting	*84*	*6=*
Written strategies	*87*	*6=*
Informal discussions with friends	*74*	*8*
Informal discussions with parents	*80*	*9*
Delegation	*72*	*10=*
Clerical support	*77*	*10=*
Development groups	*77*	*12*
Personal development	*64*	*13*
Formal consultation with parents	*67*	*14*
HMI	*38*	*15*
School Boards	*42*	*16*

Headteachers used a range of management activities to implement change.

Do you use the full range of activities within your own school?

The most popular activity overall is to *discuss implementation informally* with other headteachers. Networking of various kinds is very highly valued and may provide a means of overcoming the feelings of isolation prevelant amongst some headteachers. What is perhaps more surprising is the relatively low numbers of headteachers who have drawn on advice from School Boards or HMI. Table 2 shows the percentage of headteachers using each activity for each initiative.

Table 2: Management activites used for the implementation of the major initiatives

n=704

Management Activity	*5-14 %*	*rank*	*SDP %*	*rank*	*DSM %*	*rank*	*SDA %*	*rank*	*Overall rank*
Informal discussions with other HTs	*94*	*1*	*81*	*3*	*60*	*1=*	*57*	*1=*	*1*
Advice from EDS/EAs	*86*	*4*	*84*	*1*	*49*	*4=*	*54*	*3=*	*2=*
Documentation	*88*	*3*	*77*	*4=*	*52*	*3*	*57*	*1=*	*2=*
Formal consultation with staff	*89*	*2*	*82*	*2*	*37*	*7*	*53*	*5*	*4*
Informal discussion with staff	*78*	*5=*	*74*	*7*	*49*	*4=*	*54*	*3=*	*5*
Target setting	*74*	*7=*	*77*	*4=*	*18*	*12*	*37*	*7*	*6=*
Written strategies	*78*	*4*	*77*	*4=*	*17*	*13*	*32*	*8*	*6=*
Informal discussions with friends	*72*	*9*	*52*	*8*	*39*	*6*	*39*	*6*	*8*
Informal discussions with parents	*71*	*10*	*41*	*10*	*29*	*8*	*10*	*13=*	*10=*
Delegation	*61*	*11*	*45*	*9*	*22*	*11*	*22*	*10*	*10=*
Clerical support	*37*	*14*	*37*	*11*	*60*	*1=*	*12*	*12*	*10=*
Development groups	*74*	*7=*	*34*	*12*	*15*	*15*	*20*	*11*	*12*
Personal development	*55*	*13*	*33*	*13*	*16*	*14*	*30*	*9*	*13*
Formal consultation with parents	*56*	*12*	*33*	*14*	*23*	*10*	*4*	*15*	*14*
HMI	*35*	*15*	*28*	*15=*	*5*	*16*	*10*	*13=*	*15*
School Boards	*20*	*16*	*28*	*15=*	*26*	*9*	*3*	*16*	*16*

More management activities are used to support 5-14 than any other initiative.

Implementing 5-14

As we see from Table 2 above, headteachers tended to use more activities to manage the implementation of 5-14 than for any other initiative. These higher figures no doubt reflect the fact that 5-14 is the longest running of the four initiatives, and also reflects the scale and complexity of this initiative.

Management activities which have supported the implementation of 5-14 have included:

- starting the process by holding discussions with staff to audit existing practices in the school and develop a plan of action

Which management activities do you need to develop in order to implement the remaining strands of 5-14?

- having a clear structure for introducing change with an appropriate, sustainable pace: in some cases this meant taking one subject at a time
- where possible, using team work within the school as a way of ensuring that all are involved and responsibilities shared
- using in-service and PAT time either to cover subject areas in a systematic manner, or as time for discussing school policy and making decisions
- drawing on team teaching, where possible with peripatetic or expert teachers, as a valuable way of introducing new approaches and supporting those with less experience of particular areas
- adopting a 'cascade' approach
- drawing on advice and support from secondary colleagues and from cluster groups (where cluster groups were large, some found it helpful to set up a small-schools subgroup, as small schools' implementation strategies could differ from those of large schools).

Factors inhibiting implementation include:

- the view that the different needs of variable composite classes were not taken sufficiently into account in 5-14 documents
- the greater vulnerability of small schools to gaps in existing expertise and in opportunities to take up available training
- exacerbation of such problems by cuts in numbers of advisers and increased responsibilities for those remaining
- difficulty of planning the implementation of 5-14 effectively because of fluctuating staff numbers
- difficulty of in-depth discussion in large clusters
- failure in some clusters to share curricular resources.

Implementing SDP

Advice from advisers and development officers and formal consultation with staff are the most popular activities to support the implementation of SDP.

The majority (86%) of respondents reported that they had fully implemented SDP, and the rest (bar 1%) that they had partially implemented it. Patterns of implementation for SDP are also broadly similar to the overall pattern, although it is the only initiative where formal professional advice (from advisers or development officers) and formal consultation with staff are ranked first and second, before informal discussions with other headteachers.

What activities have you found most useful?

Management activities which have supported the implementation of SDP have included:

- starting from SOEID performance indicators, and using these as a basis for audit
- adopting a planning format which is clear and concise
- not taking on too much at one time, and setting manageable targets (although this takes practice)
- accepting that the pace of change in very small schools is likely to be slower
- recognising also that, given the emphasis on personal relationships in a small staff group, it is important to start from teachers' strengths rather than to see SDP as a way of challenging practices
- where possible, sharing the work across clusters as an effective way of spreading the workload.

The principal *inhibiting factor* has been:

- the production of written plans, which has significantly increased headteachers' workloads.

Implementing DSM

Adequate clerical support is vital to the effective implementation of DSM.

How can you use available clerical support more effectively?

Evidence suggests that headteachers in small schools hold very diverse views about DSM: in general many who have implemented the initiative welcome the opportunity to manage their own budgets; while some who have yet to implement it remain unsure of its value. One third of respondents (33%) had not yet implemented DSM at the time the survey was carried out.

Clearly, the provision of adequate clerical support is vital to the effective implementation of DSM: use of clerical support ranks first equal (with informal discussions with other headteachers) in the list of management activities associated with the implementation of DSM.

Headteachers are also less likely to use target setting or produce a written strategy for DSM. This may reflect a degree of unfamiliarity with financial matters which makes it harder for headteachers to predict and plan financial 'strategies'. Consultation with the School Board is ranked noticeably higher in relation to DSM than to the other initiatives (ninth out of the 16).

Management activities which have supported the implementation of DSM have included:

- acquiring a good grounding in the practicalities of the system and making good use of information and advice available – for example from manuals or from education authority-based financial advisers
- ensuring adequate clerical support and effective training for clerical staff.

Inhibiting factors mentioned include:

- a fear that excessive reliance on the skills of school-based clerical staff may lead to problems if trained staff leave
- the failure to recognise that demands now made of clerical staff are not commensurate with their remuneration and that it may therefore be difficult to recruit suitable staff
- in some education authorities, regulations requiring clerical staff involved with DSM to be supervised personally by the head interfere with teaching time
- lack of an efficient computerised system.

Implementing SDA

A quarter (25%) of the headteachers who took part in the survey said that they had fully implemented SDA, and less than half (44%) had partially implemented it.

Patterns of management activity to implement SDA are broadly similar to the overall pattern. Unsurprisingly, given the nature of the initiative, personal development ranks somewhat higher in relation to SDA than the other initiatives

Management activities which have supported the implementation of SDA have included:

- using team teaching (particularly across schools) as a way of raising awareness of teachers' own strengths and areas in which further development would be useful
- linking identified development needs with available staff development opportunities.

The main *inhibiting factor* mentioned by headteachers is:

- the view that the close relationship between heads and staff may be jeopardised by a formal appraisal system: several heads pointed to the difficulty of resolving problems in a context in which maintaining good personal relationships is essential.

Towards a small-school management style

Is there then a small-school management style? It seems clear to us that headteachers of small schools do not adopt an 'authoritative' style of management based upon the 'positional power' of the headteacher to make decisions, delegate tasks and monitor performance. They see themselves as part of the 'team', work with others as professional colleagues, and lead from within the group, rather than directing from the outside. This is exemplified by one as:

> *My approach to management is discussing everything with the staff . . . I see myself as 'team leader': everybody has something to add and that includes not only the teachers here but the peripatetics, janitor and the auxiliary.* (School 6: 18 pupils)

Such an approach has developed from the small-school headteacher's experience of the demands of the classroom. They remain firmly anchored to their original professional group as teachers and are, therefore, more likely to derive their authority from their professional teaching expertise rather than their position in an organisational hierarchy. By working from within a small team, skilful headteachers in small schools ensure the active involvement of all and a greater degree of commitment to planned changes. At the same time, it has to be recognised that close relations among staff in small schools need to be carefully nurtured.

Informal networking with other headteachers and use of 'cluster groups' are two popular ways of managing change.

In which ways can you improve your use of these activities?

The particular skills of the small-school headteacher lie in creating such a team, in which the head is simultaneously both leader and professional colleague, while continuously avoiding the potentially negative effects inherent in very close relationships. Additionally, limited time for management implies that headteachers of small schools must be able to cope personally with an extremely wide range of management demands (and other tasks) with limited time and resources.

Another important element in this strategy is the recognition among headteachers of small schools that they need additional help in order to implement many of the changes. They have limited opportunities for delegation and are very conscious of the importance of not overburdening staff. Consequently, many

demonstrate an 'outward looking' approach: they are keen networkers, particularly on an informal basis (informal discussion with other headteachers is the most popular management activity overall), although more formally constituted networks (such as clusters) are also seen as very effective. They are also avid users of advisory and educational development services, and are therefore very concerned about the effects of possible cuts in this area.

The benefits of looking outwards are two-fold: headteachers identify potential sources of help for the implementation of new initiatives, but also counter any tendency towards professional isolation, in a job where geographical isolation affects a substantial number (41%) of headteachers.

However, this 'outward lookingness' for professional purposes is combined with a more cautious approach to relationships with the community served by the school. While recognising the importance of support from parents and the School Board, and expressing the desire that they become more actively involved in the life of the school, headteachers are also very aware of local sensitivities. They recognise the limitations of parental or community involvement: the feeling is that parents are unlikely to be interested in the details of the curriculum, although they will provide practical help in a variety of ways.

Conclusion

There is a distinctive small-school management style based upon situational management.

How can this best be supported/developed?

Does this strategy constitute a small-schools' management style? We would suggest that the most appropriate term to describe it is *situational management* - a style based upon a realistic assessment of context, tasks and available resources. This demands a complex and sensitive array of skills derived from experience rather than position. Skilled small-school headteachers appear to be:

- pragmatic
- able to prioritise
- able to operate with focused plans
- able to lead from within the team using professional teaching experience
- prepared to draw extensively on any additional resources
- professionally outward looking
- environmentally conservative by demonstrating an awareness of community restraints
- willing to utilise all available resources.

In conclusion, we recommend a number of specific measures which would support the continuing development of a small-school style. These may be addressed at school, education authority or national level.

For headteachers:

- ensure that they continually review the range of management activities which they regularly utilise
- extend their networking skills by joining informal networks and formal school 'clusters'
- develop their information and communications technology skills.

For education authorities:

- ensure that job descriptions for small-school headships accurately reflect the full range of professional skills and knowledge required to manage effectively
- inform Appointment Committees for the appointment of new headteachers, as constituted under the School Board Act Scotland, 1988, of the possible connection between the breadth of the candidate's experiences and their ability to manage a small school
- provide timeous induction training for all newly appointed headteachers in small schools and, if this cannot be organised efficiently because of low numbers, ensure that a member of the Educational Advisory Service visits all newly appointed headteachers within their first week in post
- design staff development opportunities to take account of the specific needs of headteachers in small schools. This should include examples of planning for variable composite classes
- ensure that those headteachers who do not wish to spend the rest of their careers in small schools are offered opportunities to extend their management skills and knowledge, for example by attendance at national courses, visits or exchanges
- institute what we refer to as a 'rust prevention' programme for those headteachers (44% of the sample) who wish to spend the rest of their careers in small schools, to overcome the tendency towards 'stagnation' or isolation
- ensure that advisers and development officers are drawn from a range of different backgrounds within the education service. Secondment of effective headteachers to EDS/EAS should be actively explored
- use formal Staff Development and Appraisal programmes to offer targeted support to headteachers in small schools and keep their particular needs under review
- create formal 'clusters' in education authorities wherever these do not already exist and provide funding for cluster co-ordination
- recognise the stress inherent in the duality of the role of headteacher of a small school and develop a 'time out' system for those in particularly stressful situations, for example one-teacher schools or those with probationary teachers
- ensure that adequate clerical support is provided for all small schools
- provide additional help for all one-teacher schools (10% of the total number of small schools)
- think creatively about minimising time lost through travel by designing events to suit local circumstances, for example focusing on cluster activities or 'buying in' to local development opportunities outwith the education service
- explore the use of new technology for the delivery of staff development and the creation of an authority-wide intra-net.

For national organisations:

- ensure that a representative from small schools is included at the planning stage of all major educational initiatives
- extend the implementation period of initiatives for small schools

- second a headteacher from a small school to the SOEID Audit Unit to adapt the next national initiative – target-setting – for a small-school context
- ensure that documents are written in a 'user-friendly' way, avoiding the 'management-speak' which small-school headteachers find off-putting
- develop (particularly the SCCC and Higher Education Institutions) case-study exemplars for in-service training based upon the two- to three-teacher school (the most numerous group)
- shift the emphasis of national seminars on new initiatives to an 'action-orientated' model, which allows headteachers to undertake some of the initial planning for the transference of information to their particular contexts
- support the creation of a Scottish centre of excellence for small schools, either an actual or virtual centre, based in a HIE, which could bid for Lottery Fund money for staff development activities
- ensure that the qualification for headteachers, currently being developed, is not based exclusively upon assumptions appropriate for managing larger establishments. Modules should be developed that recognise the effects of scale and context on management and leadership style
- establish a national small-school network for drawing primarily from the 11 education authorities with the highest number of small schools which will encourage the development of resources and sharing of ideas by both teachers and pupils.

Final report

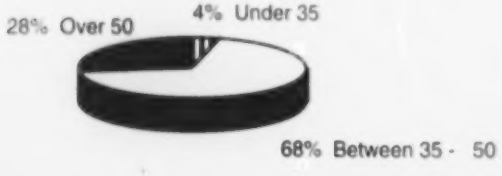
The full report, *Managing Change in Small Scottish Primary Schools*, is available from The Scottish Council for Research in Education (SCRE), 15 St John St, Edinburgh, EH8 8JR (Tel: 0131-557 2944).

The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarly reflect those of The Scottish Office, who funded the study, nor those of the Scottish Council for Research in Education.

Appendix: a profile of headteachers of small schools in Scotland

Figure 1: Gender balance of headteachers in small schools in Scotland

Figure 2: Age of headteachers in small schools



Appendix: a profile of headteachers of small schools in Scotland

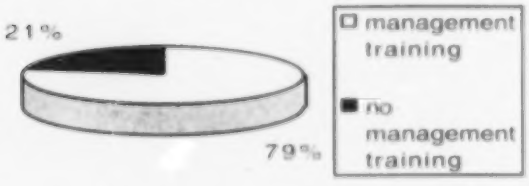
Figure 3: Percentage of small-school headteachers who live in school's catchment area

Figure 4: Percentage of small-school headteachers who attended a small school as a child

Figure 5: Percentage of small-school headteachers having previously taught in a small school

Figure 6: Percentage of small-school headteachers who originally lived in a rural area

Figure 7: Percentage who have received management training for headship



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52. Evaluation of the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) Extension
53. Cost of Pre-School Education Provision

Further information

If you have views on ***Interchange*** and/or wish to find out more about ERU's research programme, contact the Educational Research Unit (ERU), The Scottish Office Education and Industry Department, Room 2B, Victoria Quay, Edinburgh EH6 6QQ

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